

Nursing Homes...from Page 1A

from Chatuge Nursing Home has been hospitalized with the disease, though that employee has recovered "and is doing well."

President Donald Trump said recently that shipments of a viable vaccine could be available as early as next month, though it's unclear how or where those would be distributed.

But considering that 8 in 10 COVID-related deaths have occurred in senior citizens aged 65 and older, nursing homes seem a logical first stop for vaccine deliveries.

"We have been getting requests from the Department of Public Health as far as number of residents and employees to start estimating the number of vaccines that we're going to need at all of our facilities," Barnett said. "So, we've given them that information."

"We don't have any estimated date of arrival - we don't have any idea when we're going to have it to administer, but I will let the public know when we get that communication."

Barnett reiterated that the nursing homes are following all testing guidelines, and that the families of residents are alerted every time a new case crops up in one of the system's long-term care facilities.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, an outbreak is defined as when "any new case arises in (a) facility."

All nursing home residents who have died with COVID-19 were elderly and/or had significant underlying health conditions, both of which are known to contribute to mortality risks with and without the viral disease.

A majority of residents have remained well enough to stay in the nursing homes under observation per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, Barnett said, with

most experiencing mild or asymptomatic infections not requiring hospitalization.

Staff are screened each day at the beginning of their shift for temperature and symptoms prior to beginning work, and Barnett continues to emphasize the impossibility of knowing exactly how the virus entered the buildings.

The chief nursing officer continues to commend staff members at the nursing homes, saying that everyone remains vigilant in working to keep residents safe in such uncertain times, and that both facilities remain on lockdown to outside visitors as they have since mid-March.

Viral outbreaks are fairly common in nursing homes, with influenza and stomach bugs regularly affecting large percentages of long-term care residents nationwide, including in the past in Union and Towns.

Gov. Brian Kemp released new visitation guidelines for nursing home residents, many of whom have been showing clear signs of deterioration during COVID lockdowns to keep them safe, and the local nursing homes look forward to enabling visitations once the outbreaks end.

Fortunately, community spread continues to slow in Union and Towns counties, with the recent uptick in cases mostly attributable to the outbreaks in the nursing homes and an outbreak at Young Harris College.

The college canceled in-person classes for two weeks following confirmed spread in residential campus spaces earlier this month, but last week reported no spread among employees and a "significant decline in the number of presumed and confirmed COVID-19 cases."

And the local school systems in both communities have experienced limited

impacts from the virus. As of Friday - more than a month into the school year - Union County Schools was reporting zero current COVID-positive students and staff, and Towns County only had two students and no staff with current positive cases.

Furthermore, Barnett was happy to report that Union General Hospital was finally down to a single COVID unit instead of two, with nine patients hospitalized for COVID-19 in Blairsville as of Friday: two from Union, two from Towns, two from Fannin, and three from Cherokee County, North Carolina.

"That's huge for us to not have as many inpatients - I think that speaks to the decrease in prevalence in the community," Barnett said. "Our emergency rooms have been extremely busy, but the number of COVID-related visits have been trending down as well."

"I think that's all good news from a community perspective. If we can just work through our issues at the nursing homes, then hopefully we'll continue to see things look more positive for the community overall."

Through the first week in September, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services had linked 54,437 deaths to COVID-19 in nursing home facilities, at the time making up at least 30% of all COVID-related deaths in the U.S.

Separately, Barnett said that seasonal influenza has just about arrived, and she advises people to go ahead and get their vaccinations out of the way "to help contribute to a decrease in flu cases."

"This will be important as we go into the fall and winter season and have to potentially deal with both illnesses simultaneously," Barnett said. "We have already seen a few positive flu cases this week."

Law Enforcement...from Page 1A



L-R, Front: Wayne Hollis, Sheriff-Elect Kenneth "Ode" Henderson and Bill Frisbey. Back: Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

be chaos all over the country. A lot of people know that, but not everybody, unfortunately. I think people are very thankful for them as a whole."

The group was provided with a meal from Happy Hawg BBQ with a cake made by Ingles, and officers from around the county were invited to stop in and enjoy the appreciation meal, with more than 25 showing up.

Having an involved community helps to reinforce the values and ideals that have made Towns County the place it is today, which Commissioner

Bradshaw is always happy to see.

"This makes me very proud of our community and the county, and these folks are partnering to do this together, so we are very, very thankful for them," Bradshaw said. "We have been talking about doing this for some time now, and we have finally put it together. It makes me feel good that we have patriotic Americans that appreciate others."

As officers were getting their plates and socializing, they offered thanks to the organizers and enjoyed their time together,

taking a short break from their regular responsibilities.

Towns County Sheriff's Deputy Bill Conway certainly enjoyed breaking bread with his fellow officers and members of the community Saturday.

"It is a great feeling to know that we are in a community that embraces law enforcement, unlike other parts of the country," Conway said.

Both Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton and Sheriff-Elect Kenneth "Ode" Henderson attended the event, as well as Union County Sheriff Mack Mason.

Homecoming...from Page 1A

Homecoming will be the parade, which will move through Downtown Hiawassee on Thursday, Sept. 24, starting at 6 p.m. The community is encouraged to attend and cheer the children on.

"This year is limited; it is just the parade," Perren said.

"There won't be the bonfire or the pep rally at the end like we normally do. That said, what we want to do is provide as close to a normal school year as we possibly can for the kids."

"I have been an educator for 28 years, but these seniors will only be a senior one time. It is important to me that they get the experience. We are going to do our best to provide as close to normal as we can."

The 2020 Girls Homecoming Court consists of seniors Lelia Barnard, Allie Dills, Vanessa Floyd, Ellee

King, Cheyanne Shook and Taylor Thompson.

Underclassmen representatives have already been selected, with Josie Poston representing ninth grade, Sarah Shook representing 10th grade, and Bria Chastain representing 11th grade.

The 2020 Boys Football Homecoming Court includes seniors Aidan Berrong, Nick Houser, Seth Kinsey, Kolby Moss, Camren Owenby and Mason Thomas.

While students will be missing out on large aspects of Homecoming, such as the pep rally, the bonfire and even the school dance, they remain thankful for the opportunity to be together as a class.

"I am very grateful that we have been able to come here and not have online schools like most schools in Georgia, so

we are really lucky," Vanessa Floyd said. "It is an honor for your classmates to pick you to be a representative."

"We are all very appreciative. We are looking forward to sports and all the traditional senior year things, and we really appreciate our school system for going extra and doing these things for us."

Aidan Berrong seconded Floyd's comments, saying he, too, was looking forward to a final year of sports, which were canceled this past spring due to COVID-19.

"It is good that we are having sports; I play basketball and baseball," Berrong said. "Basketball starts soon, and I feel like we are going to get pretty far, so I am excited for that. I think we will have a good year."

Transition Talks...from Page 1A

list of items a new sheriff needs to inspect and be familiar with right away.

Often a new sheriff takes office on Jan. 1 without having had any access to the office and is immediately met with a long list of challenges, some of which require swift action.

Sheriff Clinton wants to make sure that Sheriff-Elect Henderson is already familiar with his office and has had an opportunity for input on the budget and other areas that will affect him.

All parties agree that the citizens of Towns County

deserve the best from their Sheriff's Office. Over the next three months, Sheriff Clinton and Sheriff-Elect Henderson will be working together to ensure that the new sheriff gets off to a good start on day one.

"It is good that we are able to have something outside and people can come and enjoy a few things, because people are not getting to do anything as far as going to concerts or festivals," Thomason said. "Everything has been canceled or postponed, so this is an opportunity for them to come out and enjoy themselves."

More details on the upcoming events can be found at GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

GMF Yard Sale...from Page 1A

Then, on Saturday, they will have the show down here on the Fairgrounds, where they give out their awards at 3 o'clock.

"We also have the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Craft Show instead of a Fall Festival. We can't have the music in the music hall because of COVID and social distancing, so we are going to have all the booths open and have crafts. It is \$5 admission, and 12 and under is free."

"All the vendors are completely full, and we have food vendors and people

bringing tents. We will have the Pioneer Village open as well with some music on the grounds."

Other events coming to the Fairgrounds this year are the Appalachian Brew, Stew & Que Festival, the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!, and a New Year's Firework Show, which will be a new in 2020.

With all the upcoming events, Thomason is hopeful that the end of the year will be better than the beginning and that folks will be able to

participate in more community activities at the Fairgrounds.

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Gold Star Mothers, Fathers, and Families to be honored by American Legion Auxiliary at Local Davenport Vet Center

On Sunday, September 27th, from 1-4 PM, the local Unit 121 of the American Legion Auxiliary will hold an open house at the Leon Davenport Veterans Center on 78 Old Blue Ridge Highway (the gray building that used to be the Blairsville Chamber of Commerce, adjacent to the park and ride).

Those who have experienced the grief of having a loved one perish in combat, or through service-related suicide, are encouraged to come and join in a time of fellowship and reflection. Please know you are

not alone. During the open house there will be a candle lighting ceremony and the Miss-

ing Man recitation will be given on the half hour during the open house. Attendees are encouraged to bring a photo of their loved one to place on the altar of honor, and attendees will be given a few moments to speak, if they desire.

COVID precautions will be taken; social distancing will be observed and masks will be required to be worn inside the building.

Light refreshments will be serviced. For more information about the event, please contact Unit President/Chaplain Janice Walters-Taylor at 706-745-1854.



Wayne Hollis and Bill Frisbey look on as Gina Frisbey cuts a specially prepared "Thin Blue Line" cake with an icing inscription reading, "In Our Community, Law Enforcement Officers Matter." Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Elections Board...from Page 1A

marks or other issues were separated out for joint review by one Republican-appointed and one Democrat-appointed adjudicator.

These adjudicators work to interpret the intent of voters and, together, they fill out new ballots to be counted when manually adjudicating votes.

Unfortunately, the lower sensitivity of the manual setting seemingly resulted in two scanned votes for District 50 State Senate Candidate Bo Hatchett counting as "no votes" in the Aug. 11 Republican Primary Runoff, so they didn't register in his favor even though the ballots were clearly cast for him.

This error was discovered during the Aug. 31 race recount after a Dominion technician switched the machines to the higher sensitivity setting to electronically adjudicate all hand-filled ballots. The Secretary of State's Office assigns one Dominion tech per election to operate machines and maintain settings.

With electronic adjudication, a scanned ballot that is uninterpretable by a voting machine is flagged for adjudication, after which it is reproduced digitally on a touchscreen for adjudicators to mark the intent of the voter.

The process is apparently more streamlined than manual adjudication, according to adjudicator Charlotte Sleczkowski, who attended the Sept. 9 regular board meeting.

Manual adjudication will still have to be used in some instances, such as when torn ballots fail to run correctly through the scanning machines.

Also in the meeting, Oliva said Daren "Bear" Osborn and his son Tyler had withdrawn their voter registration challenges/inquiries filed shortly after the Aug. 11 Republican Primary Runoff. Oliva reported that the

board office had been able to separate the roughly two dozen challenges into three main categories, which were handled as follows:

1) Voters the Osborns believed had not participated in recent elections and should therefore be purged from the rolls; apparently, the Osborns had been reviewing an older voting list not reflective of recent elections, and the board office determined these allegedly inactive voters were active.

2) Voters the Osborns believed to be inappropriately casting ballots due to reported out-of-state residency status, including dual citizenship voters; the board office determined these voters were qualified to vote under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

3) Other voters alleged to be living outside of Towns County, for whom the Osborns decided not to pursue challenges after a thorough consideration of the residences of the people on the list.

Osborn lost the runoff election to Kenneth "Ode" Henderson, who subsequently became the Republican nominee for the office of Towns County Sheriff. With no other candidates appearing on the November ballot, Henderson is set to be sworn into office January 2021.

Early in-person voting for the November election will take place at the Towns County Board of Elections Office in Hiawassee weekdays between Oct. 12-30, with one weekend day of voting on Saturday, Oct. 24. Early voting hours will run from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Building, aka Stephens Lodge; and Macedonia at Macedonia Baptist Church.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, with Oct. 5 being the registration deadline for voters looking to participate in the Nov. 3 election.

Board members have been holding extensive conversations behind the scenes about the importance of maintaining the integrity of Towns County's elections, with everyone pledging to continue doing their best for the upcoming General Election.

The Elections Board encourages voters to call the board office with questions at 706-896-4353, and people can find much information at.mvp.sos.ga.gov, aka Georgia's My Voter Page, including registration status, mail-in application/ballot status, poll location, sample ballots and more.

Board Member Betsy Young and Adjudicator Sleczkowski are chairpersons of the Towns County Republican and Democratic parties respectively, and both agreed to look at coordinating important voter information on each party's Facebook page, including info about absentee voting by mail.

Official ballots were finalized recently, and voters who have already requested a mail-in absentee should keep an eye on their mailboxes for ballot deliveries starting this week.

For in-person voting, all precincts in the Nov. 3 election will be following COVID-19 best practices to keep voters and poll workers alike as safe as possible as people turn out to cast their ballots in just six short weeks, as well as during early voting at the board office.